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## **America Must Let Iraq Rebuild Itself**

By IYAD ALAWI

BAGHDAD, Iraq

No Iraqi will ever forget the momentous April day when a crowd of hundreds of cheering Baghdadis, helped by an American armored vehicle, pull the huge statue of Saddam Hussein to the ground. With this act, we tore down three decades of tyranny and repression and began building in its place a foundation for freedom, democracy and a better future for our children.

To see that this goal is achieved, the Bush administration has challenged me and my colleagues on the Iraqi Governing Council to draft a permanent constitution within six months and to move as quickly as possible to hold internationally monitored, free elections. We gladly accept that challenge, and welcome the vital assistance of the United Nations, through the Security Council resolution passed on Thursday, to see through to completion the enormous task ahead.

But we also realize that there are obstacles on Iraq's march toward democracy. In the months since Iraq was liberated, jubilation has given way to insecurity and chaos. When my fellow Iraqis finally go to the polls to elect their government, they must have confidence that state institutions are not only legitimate and independent, but robust enough to guarantee safety and civil rights. That is why the coalition and the council must take several immediate steps to establish these necessary conditions for the constitutional process to succeed.

First, it is vital to call up the Iraqi Army and the national police force, at least up to mid-officer level. The coalition's early decision to abolish the army and police was well intended, but it unfortunately resulted in a security vacuum that let criminals, die-hards of the former regime and international terrorists flourish. And the coalition's plan to build a 20,000-member lightly armed force mostly responsible for security and border control would make poor use of a valuable resource: the 300,000 Iraqi soldiers who simply went home with their weapons in the face of the American-led invasion.

Most of these soldiers are Iraqi patriots who chose not to fight for Saddam Hussein. Americans should not confuse the Iraqi Army with the hated Republican Guard, which Saddam Hussein created precisely because he distrusted the legitimate military. In one simple process, the coalition authority can support the governing council to call the army back to its barracks for

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retraining and, ultimately, for redeployment. Most soldiers and their officers will proudly return to their units and contribute to their country's future.

The coalition and the Iraqi Interior Ministry can vet officers to remove those who committed crimes under the old regime, and then rapidly redeploy the most capable units to work with, and progressively relieve, American troops of security duties. Iraqi Army units have an established chain of command and esprit de corps. Not only can they be recalled to barracks immediately, but it would be much easier and quicker to retrain and re-equip them within their existing organizational structure than to start from scratch.

By supporting the recall of army units, the United States would not only speed the process of relieving the burden on its troops, it would also gain substantial good will in Iraq. In contrast, any American-led military presence, even if complemented by the United Nations, will never have the credibility and legitimacy that the Iraqi Army has among the people.

In addition, the Iraqi national police must also be recalled. Most Iraqi policemen — as opposed to Saddam Hussein's feared intelligence and security organs — are dedicated to law and order. The United States does not have the time or money to create a police force from the ground up, nor is it necessary, because we have a large, organized force that is ready and willing to serve.

Many other Iraqi governing institutions should also be reactivated by the governing council, with the support of the coalition authority. Special priority must be given to the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Finance, Oil and Education. The Iraqi bureaucracy must also be called back to work, although of course after screening to disqualify serious offenders of the former regime. Together, the council and the coalition leaders can modernize the state apparatus, phase out obsolete policies and practices, and encourage a new mindset of transparency and efficiency.

Finally, as security improves, Iraqi institutions are re-established and the constitutional drafting process is completed, the United States should support international recognition of Iraqi sovereignty. Then a recognized interim government could quickly present a popular referendum, under United Nations monitoring, on the new national constitution. It would be a grave mistake for the United States to hold out sovereignty and international recognition as the reward for passage of a constitution. Rather, making Iraqis once again a part of the international system is the prerequisite of successful reconstruction and a durable democratic system.

Iraqis are grateful for the tremendous efforts and sacrifices the United States is making on our behalf. Yet, ultimately, only Iraqis themselves can restore security, rebuild national institutions, enact a constitution and elect a democratic government. America must not rebuff Iraqis who are eager to have a stake in this intimate national process. Like any free people, we want to ensure that we are in control of our own destiny.

*Iyad Alawi is serving as president of the Iraqi Governing Council this month.*

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**The Washington Post**

**October 19, 2003, Sunday**

**EDITORIAL DESK**

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**By Iyad Alawi ( Op-Ed ) 928 words**

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# The Washington Post

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*David Ignatius*

## One Iraqi's Insights

LONDON—Amid the confusing parade of Iraqi politicians vying for influence these days in Baghdad, a little-known figure named Ayad Allawi deserves a special hearing—for the simple reason that he has been right about the big issues affecting postwar Iraq.

Allawi has argued for more than a decade that a stable Iraq is possible only if most Iraqis believe they have a place in the new order. The only people he would exclude from this big tent are those who were directly involved in Saddam Hussein's regime of torture and repression.

This strategy of inclusion may seem obvious, but it was rejected in the early days of the U.S. occupation, with disastrous consequences. With Iraq now in disarray, Allawi, in a recent interview here, outlined his views about how to stabilize the country.

Allawi is a member of the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, chairing the committee that handles security issues. He previously headed an exile group called the Iraqi National Accord, but he's much less well known in the West than his flamboyant fellow exile, Ahmed Chalabi.

Where Chalabi was the Pentagon's man, the burly, moon-faced Allawi has been described as an ally of the CIA and British intelligence. Though trained as a doctor, he spent much of the past two decades running intelligence operations against Saddam Hussein. His group failed in a 1996 CIA-backed military coup, but it maintained contacts with dissident Iraqi officers and helped persuade some units not to resist the U.S.-led invasion last March.

Allawi has consistently urged the United States to work with honest military officers and civil servants from the old regime in the transition to a new Iraq. He told me in March 2002 that the United States needed to reassure Iraqis that it didn't want to destroy the country, humiliate its army or punish ordinary Iraqis who cooperated with the Baath Party because they had no choice.

That strategy was clearly correct, in hindsight. Unfortunately, it was abandoned when U.S. occupation chief L. Paul Bremer decided last May to disband the Iraqi army. This decision is now widely viewed as America's biggest mistake in postwar planning.

Allawi says he warned a meeting of top U.S. generals that disbanding the army would create a dangerous "vacuum" in the country. The generals seemed to agree, but soon after, Bremer decided that the army should be dissolved, apparently on the advice of Cha-

labi and others.

The postwar power vacuum proved as dangerous as Allawi and others had feared. Foreign fighters slipped in across the open border, and in the chaos were able to set up safe houses and links with operatives from the old regime. Their network was bolstered by some of the cashiered Iraqi soldiers, who "started to organize themselves in clusters," Allawi says.

Another unfortunate "twist," says Allawi, was that disbanding the army and the Baath Party destroyed two power centers for Iraq's Sunni Muslim minority, and convinced many Sunnis they had no place in the new Iraq. They began to revolt in the now-infamous "Sunni Triangle" north and west of Baghdad. Asked to describe the enemy, Allawi frankly blames "our own creation of the problem, changing Iraqis to be against us."

So how can the U.S.-led coalition rebuild trust and security in Iraq? Allawi urges the Bush administration to fix past mistakes and build strong, inclusive Iraqi institutions.

The Iraqi army should be rebuilt quickly, to a force of up to 250,000, he contends. Officers from the old army should be vetted and retrained in Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan and perhaps Turkey. No members of the old Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard need apply, but most others would be welcome, he says.

A new Iraq will need an intelligence service, and Allawi urges a force of several thousand people. The coalition should continue with its plans to train about 140,000 members of a new civil defense force to help police Iraqi cities, roads, bridges and pipelines. Within that force, Allawi wants a 700-man counterterrorism brigade recruited from the militias of the five leading political factions—to draw the militias under the wing of a new Iraqi state.

Allawi, a 58-year-old Shiite Muslim, says he has been working hard this past week to persuade the Shiite spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, to drop his demand for early elections—which he fears would only add to Iraq's instability.

Allawi has made his share of mistakes, and he's better suited for life in the shadows than atop a political podium. But he got the big issues right, and he can help the Bush administration now as it struggles to fix the Iraq mess.

*davidignatius@washpost.com*



### **Dr. Ayad Allawi**

Dr. Ayad Allawi served as President of the Iraqi Governing Council during October 2003. In addition to serving as a member of the Iraqi Governing Council, he is also the chairman of the Council's Security Committee, responsible for developing and coordinating the activities of Iraq's new security institutions after of the fall of the previous Ba'ath regime.

Prior to the liberation of Iraq, Dr. Allawi had long been a vocal opponent of Saddam Hussein's regime and a staunch advocate for regime change. Dr. Allawi, a qualified medical doctor, resigned from the Ba'ath party in 1976 after serving as the head of all Ba'ath party organizations in Europe. He fled Iraq and the Ba'ath Party when it became clear that the then new regime of Saddam Hussein was intent on turning the country into a police state, and the Party into a spy network to serve the dictator, his family, and his larger Al-Tikriti clan.

In 1976, Dr. Allawi, along with other Iraqi civilian regime opponents, began forming the earliest opposition groups, including the founding cells of what would become the Iraq National Accord. In 1978, Iraqi intelligence agents attempted to assassinate Dr. Allawi in London. He was seriously injured and needed hospitalization for about three months. Full records of this incident can be found in the files of the Special Branch.

Unfortunately, during the 1970s and 1980s Western governments' support for Saddam Hussein prevented the Iraqi National Accord and other opposition groups from effectively confronting the regime in Iraq.

Only after the Invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 by Saddam, that the INA was able to publicly declare its political program of working to replace the dictatorial regime of Saddam with a democratic, pluralistic government. The main points of the INA's political charter can be found at [http://www.wifaq.com/intro\\_english.html](http://www.wifaq.com/intro_english.html).

Throughout the 1990s the INA publicly lobbied international governments to support their efforts to change the regime in Baghdad. Within Iraq the INA organized cells to infiltrate and collect intelligence on the government's activities, working strenuously to undermine Saddam Hussein's despicable regime.

Dr. Allawi is the Secretary-General of the Iraqi National Accord.

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